

**Structural and Narrative Aspects of the
Slow Movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto**

by

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1. Introduction

Although two hundred years have passed since the composition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D major Op. 61 (1806), no consensus has ever been reached on a description of the particular structure of its second movement. Is this not surprising? Surprising, that a piece of music not overtly complex but rather simple and elegant in design, 91 bars in full (around 9–10 minutes in performance), has remained such an enigma for so long a time? Descriptions of the *Larghetto* run from “a theme and variations” (Donald Francis Tovey) to “chain of variations” (Lewis Lockwood) to “semi-variation movement” (Roger Fiske) to commentators like George Grove who refrain from using the word “variation” at all.¹ One agreement that musicologists *do* share is that the structure of the *Larghetto* reflects anything but the conventional Classical style of concertos of Beethoven's day. A key article in coming to grips with this subject—or phenomenon—is Owen Jander's “Romantic Form and Content in the Slow Movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto,” published in *The Musical Quarterly* in 1983. Jander's intention in this key article is fourfold: he crystallizes the subject and puts it on a new academic footing; suggests a general correspondence between the form of the second movement and the genre of the *Romanze*; determines that the main theme of the movement has its basis in the chaconne; and, in a final controversial section, attempts to interpret the “quasinarrative character” of the interplay between the orchestra and the solo violin.² My intention in this paper is to point out fundamental structural elements of

¹ Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Volume III Concertos* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 93; Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven The Music and the Life* (W. W. Norton & Company: New York, 2005), 247; Roger Fiske, *Beethoven Concertos and Overtures* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977), 31; George Grove, “Beethoven's Violin Concerto. (Op. 61)”, *The Musical Times* 46 (1 Jul. 1905), 459–71. Also “theme-and-variations structure”: Leon Plantings, *Beethoven's Concertos* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 226; “set of variations”: Barry Cooper, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163.

² Owen Jander, “Romantic Form and Content in the Slow Movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto”, *The Musical Quarterly* 69 (Spring, 1983), 164.

the *Larghetto* that Jander fails to mention; as well as elaborate on Jander's clever discovery of the chaconne foundation by way of offering my own description of the "narrative" of the slow movement.

Robin Stowell in his *Beethoven: Violin Concerto* confirms the fact of the *Larghetto*'s "unconventional, open-ended structure" and remarks, "Most commentators have been at a loss to describe it accurately in terms of traditional structures." Stowell himself suggests that the movement contains "not so much variations as varied orchestrations of Theme A."³ Yet, further down on the same page, Stowell presents a table, a structural outline of the movement, in which he repeatedly uses the word "variation" to refer to the successive episodes! This by no means suggests that Stowell has erred; the apparent contradiction simply reflects the centuries-long difficulty in finding precise words to describe once and for all the structural essence of the movement. Indeed, Jander describes the *Larghetto* as "one of the most *mysteriously* serene pieces of music ever composed."⁴

2. Structural vs. thematic analysis

One of the clues with which one can come to grips with the *Larghetto* is the phrase "poetic intent." The enigmatic structure of the second movement, "its unorthodoxy," according to Jander, "is clearly the result of poetic intent." He says straight out: "poetic intention is a *fact* with Beethoven. To refuse to discuss the matter is a scholarly stance of dubious responsibility."⁵ Stowell agrees that Beethoven proceeded with "poetic intentions," and an acknowledgement of this fact, he says, could help with understanding Beethoven's "unorthodox and individualistic treatment of the slow movement." Stowell

³ Robin Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75.

⁴ Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 159 (my emphasis).

⁵ Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 172; 179.

continues: “To describe it simply as a theme and variations would ignore the philosophical and aesthetic debates of late-eighteenth century musicians and theorists and underestimate the extent of Beethoven’s extra-musical inspiration.”⁶

Yet it is easy for a commentator to embellish his own commentary with “poetic intent” that resembles nothing so much as “flights of fancy.” Here is one species of description, for example, George Grove’s attempt to capture the essence of the second movement:

The lovely melody, with its beseeching, yearning tone, the soft, sustained accompaniment of the strings, and the mellow, tranquil, reiterated call of the horns, seem to suggest the ‘calm and deep peace’ of a lovely autumn day, in a still land like that of the Lotos-eaters of the poet.⁷

Although Jander firmly believes in Beethoven’s “poetic intentions,” he considers *this* particular poetic description “unsatisfactory” and “irrelevant.”⁸ Jander’s condemnation apparently hinges on the difference between a *thematic* analysis and a *structural* analysis. That is to say, studying *how* the piece is put together (structural) is a different modality of analysis from contemplating *what* the piece evokes (thematic) in the mind of the listener. Jander proceeds on the assumption that a structural analysis is to some degree closer to the foundation of objectivity than a thematic commentary.

Jander proposes that the “quasinarrative” aspect of the second moment is a “dispute in dialogue” which celebrates the “Power of Song.” This thesis is, he admits, “thoroughly poetic—and it is of course intentionally so”; yet it is meant to be poetic in a different way from Grove’s “irrelevant” prose. Jander’s process of structural analysis, he

⁶ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 85–86.

⁷ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469 (referring to bb. 65–69).

⁸ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 179.

continues, may be misconstrued by some readers as “a personal, romanticized interpretation [i.e., in the manner of Grove’s]. *Other readers, I trust, will appreciate that this is not my intention.*”⁹ While Jander refrains from elaborating further on this intention, we are evidently led to ponder the difference between structural and thematic analyses of musical pieces. Whereas the latter is a demonstration of the subjective, the former, as apparently understood by Jander, may have about it an element of the impersonal and objective. However, although Stowell accepts the presence of the ambiguity of “poetic intentions” in the *Larghetto*, he considers Jander’s description of its narrative structure as “arguably of questionable content.”¹⁰ Just as Jander disregarded Grove’s attempt, so Stowell disregards Jander’s.

Why? Because a structural analysis of an artwork is still subjective. In an architectural blueprint the identity and content of its diagrammatic shapes and their interrelationships are not only clearly defined but unequivocal, so that neither interpretation nor debate is required to comprehend the sole and distinct meaning of the document. The form and content of the *Larghetto*, in contrast, remain tantalizingly ambiguous. Consequently, *there will never be only one structural description of the slow movement*. In addition to this, a narrative explication will always *only* be a “personal . . . interpretation” and by no means can be equated with an account of an ideal objective form. Still and all, this predominant ambiguity should not prohibit us from thinking about the structural and narrative aspects of the movement. We may never come to a consensus on the definitive identity of the *Larghetto*, yet still another attempt at elucidation is necessary, because, for one reason, neither Jander nor Stowell points out what I believe are basic elements of the *Larghetto*’s structure.

⁹ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 172-173; 179 (my emphasis).

¹⁰ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 85.

3. Variations? Semi-variations? Repetition?

Stowell praises Jander's breakdown of the movement, which Stowell identifies as "beyond dispute":¹¹

[primary melodic instrumentation in bold]

bars 1–10: Theme A	[strings]
bars 11–20: Variation 1 of Theme A	[horns, 1st Clarinet, Violins , Viola]
bars 21–30: Variation 2 of Theme A	[1st Bassoon , all strings]
bars 31–40: Variation 3 of Theme A	[tutti: Clarinets, Bassoons, horns, strings]
bars 40–44: Ornamental extension	
bars 45–55: Theme B	
bars 56–65: Variation 4 of Theme A	[solo violin , with pizzicato accompaniment]
bars 65–70: Theme C	
bars 71–79: Reprise of Theme B (elaborated)	
bars 79–83: Reprise of Theme C	
bars 83–91: Coda	

The principal theme, as it progresses from episode to episode (bb. 20–40), remains largely faithful to its original appearance; and returns one more time as played by the solo violin with string support, this last in a true variation form (bb. 56–65). For the purposes of my following discussion, it does not matter if the subsequent manifestations of Theme A are described as variations or semi-variations or repetition. The question can remain

¹¹ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 85. Graham Williams, however, defines the Reprise of Theme C as bb. 80–86, and "Final ref. to A" as bb. 87–91. See his *Beethoven Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61* (Leeds: Mayflower Enterprises, 1986), 15.

open; my discussion below does not hinge on a final understanding of the point. However, Stowell's "varied orchestrations" of the theme rather than "variations" is quite possibly an unassailable description. In the so-called Variation 1 (bb. 10–20), when the first clarinet, supported by the violins, takes on the main role, the clarinet plays the theme precisely as the first violins had in Theme A (bb. 1–10), except for one difference: a minim rest is added after the clarinet's second phrase (b. 14). In Variation 2, the first bassoon, performing the main melodic role, plays the same melody as the first clarinet (i.e., with a minim rest), transposed down an octave. If one wishes to describe the repetition of Theme A as "variations," then it must be observed that the variations, with respect to the melody, are very slight indeed. In accordance with this, Antony Hopkins initially uses the description "complex set of variations on a theme" to characterize the *Larghetto* only to subsequently refer to Variation 3 (bb. 30–40) as "not even a true variation," but a "newly orchestrated" statement of Theme A.¹² Generally speaking, *we bear the same theme repeated four times in a row*.

Stowell believes Jander's structural outline is "beyond dispute," and yet, significantly, the two music scholars have a disagreement, not stated by Stowell, regarding the precise nature of bars 56–65. Jander describes Variation 4 as played specifically by the solo violin, with "orchestral strings providing a pizzicato background."¹³ Stowell, in contrast, describes Variation 4 as played primarily not by the soloist but by the orchestral violins: "The violins pluck the outline of Theme A over a simple pizzicato string accompaniment which provides the momentum for this variation. The soloist contributes *cantabile* embroidery . . ." ¹⁴ Stowell fails to mention that he characterizes Variation 4 in a manner different to Jander. This quirk—how is Variation 4 to be understood?—is one more manifestation of the riddling nature of the *Larghetto*.

¹² Antony Hopkins, *The Seven Concertos of Beethoven* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 80.

¹³ Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 177.

¹⁴ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 77–78.

4. The most general structure of the *Larghetto*

Jander and Stowell are in agreement regarding the division of the consecutive episodes of the *Larghetto*. Both, however, fail to remark on an even more general structure of the movement: its *fundamental two-part structure*. Just as a motion picture has sequences built out of scenes, and acts built out of sequences; and just as a novel or other literary work can order its chapters or divisions into “Parts,” “Books,” or “Volumes,” so the *Larghetto*, according to the breakdown above, has, in a manner of speaking, eleven episodes—but these episodes are ordered according to a basic two-part structure. This is no small point. Recognizing the general organizing principle of the two-part structure of the episodes is key to an attempt at speculating on a narrative of the overall movement.

The most general structure of the *Larghetto* can be described in this manner: Part I comprises bb. 1–40, which is built of the four orchestral manifestations of Theme A; and Part II comprises bb. 40–91, in which the solo violin has center stage and the orchestra serves as background support.

Although neither Donald Francis Tovey nor Antony Hopkins remarks specifically on the two-part structure of the movement, both refer to it indirectly while describing the transition from bb. 1–40 to bb. 40–91. “And now occurs something unique in the history of musical form,” writes Tovey, referring to the *Larghetto*’s particular, unorthodox second half, which Hopkins describes as “designed to break away from the rigid framework of strict variation form.”¹⁵ Jander *almost* enters into a discussion on the matter when he writes, “[T]he succession of strophes builds to a climax that occurs about midway in the movement. The remainder of the movement . . . becomes a

¹⁵ Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Volume III Concertos*, 94; Hopkins, *The Seven Concertos of Beethoven*, 81.

meditative aftermath to that climax.”¹⁶ Jander identifies the transitional point at the “about midway,” yet he fails to specifically describe the movement in terms of two halves. However, only *after* the *Larghetto*’s two-part structure is identified and explicated should we follow with Jander’s multi-part breakdown.

5. General aspects of Part I

i. Chaconne

The most vital component of Jander’s essay may be his assertion that the principal theme of Part I (bb. 1–10) is a slowed-down version of a chaconne. Traditionally a chaconne was a dance played at a quick tempo whose structure was marked by variation. Its qualities, particularly in its Italian and French manifestations, were its cheerfulness, lively light-heartedness, and rousing character. The French chaconne often appeared as stage dances closing out productions in an upbeat manner, such as in some of Lully’s operas where chaconnes were elaborate numbers celebrating the final triumph of a hero. The chaconne was ordinarily in the major (the *Larghetto* is in G major) and utilized triple meter. Since Stowell’s chapter on the *Larghetto* relies so heavily on Jander’s essay, and because both Jander’s essay and Stowell’s book are so readily available, I feel no need here to go over yet again Jander’s satisfying support for his discovery, which, most significantly, explores the presence of the venerable tetrachordal bass pattern of the chaconne in Theme A, as well as Beethoven’s ingenious suggestion of triple meter in the common time Theme A. Of Beethoven’s use of the chaconne bass Jander points out, “The tempo is *largo*—far slower than any tetrachordal pieces in Baroque tradition.

¹⁶ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 175.

The resulting harmonic rhythm is thus so protracted as to make this piece perceptible as a chaconne only through conscious effort.”¹⁷

After Jander supports at convincing length his assertion of the chaconne connection, he fails to explore *why* Beethoven would employ the chaconne in this dramatically protracted manner. Indeed, the word “chaconne” itself is conspicuously absent from Jander’s commentary on the quasinarrative character of the movement. It is surprising that Jander’s treatment of the narrative of the *Larghetto* fails to make use of what may be the most enduring aspect of his entire paper! Stowell, whose extensive and uncritical use of the Jander material on this point strongly suggests his acceptance of it, similarly refrains from offering a single reason for the *slowed-down quality* of the chaconne bass. Since Beethoven’s use of the chaconne is so idiosyncratic, a specific exploration of its use seems compulsory.

The chaconne as an instrumental piece had become unfashionable in Europe by the mid eighteenth century. But Beethoven composed his Violin Concerto in 1806. Hence, Part I of the *Larghetto* is not only a *slowed-down dance*, slowed down to the point of its being virtually hidden as what it is, but it is also *a memory of an antique style*, a recollection of a time that is past. Neither Jander nor Stowell mentions this aspect.

ii. The quality of repetition in Part I

In Part I, Theme A is played by different orchestral groupings four times in a row. During the second and third expressions of the theme (bb. 10–30), the solo violin is also playing, but is not mirroring or supporting the theme but rather expressing its own particular phrases. (Jander mentions that “each melodic gesture [of the solo violin] enters

¹⁷ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 168.

only after the beat,” which does not suggest “involvement.”¹⁸) Part I is marked significantly by repetition, yet is not built *only* of repetition, and hence is of a different structural quality from two other compositions that make use of repetition to a great degree, Ravel’s *Boléro* and the greater part of the first movement of Symphony No. 7 (*Leningrad*) of Shostakovich.

The fundamental two-part theme of *Boléro* is repeated nine times in a row, moving from one group of instruments to another without a solo instrument playing off the “orchestral tissue” (Ravel’s words) at any time; although the differing orchestrations of each repetition create different textures, “there are no contrasts,” stated Ravel.¹⁹ Similarly, the principal theme (sometimes referred to as the “march” or “invasion” theme) of the *Allegretto* of Shostakovich’s *Leningrad* Symphony is repeated twelve times in a row, also moving from one instrumental grouping to another without an overlay of contrasting elements from an instrument or instruments.

A clue in how to identify and reckon with the structure of Part I of Beethoven’s *Larghetto* is the last movement of Alfred Schnittke’s *In Memoriam* (1979). There, the principal theme is played on the organ fourteen times in a row—but, and here is the significant difference from *Boléro* and the *Leningrad*, throughout the somber succession of the repetition there is an overlay of spare orchestral events which arise and die away, as if the principal, repetitive theme corresponds to the something foundational in existence, the something eternal or unchanging in nature and the universe, while the orchestral events that come and go over this static foundation are related to the random and the fleeting, the kaleidoscope of emotions of the human. Another way of putting it is that the principal, repetitive theme is “cosmic time” while the orchestral events that come and go represent “human time.” The foundational theme can be described as *The Implacable*. The

¹⁸ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 174.

¹⁹ M. D. Calvocoressi and Maurice Ravel, “Ravel’s Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments”, *The Musical Quarterly* 27 (Jan., 1941), 17.

overlay of orchestral events can be described as the *Vicissitudes of Human Nature*. Similarly, in Part I of Beethoven's *Larghetto* the implacable repetition of the primary theme is implicated with the *contrast* of varying gestures from the solo instrument.

iii. *Romanze*

Jander proposes that the *Larghetto* may have also been influenced by the genre of the *Romanze*. A romance is a ballad-type instrumental song of simplicity and lyricism, and the term has often been used to describe slow movements. Jean Jacques Rousseau, writing of the vocal genre of romance in the *Dictionnaire de Musique* of 1768, remarked that its subject is “ordinarily some amorous, and often tragic, story” and it “should be written in a style that is simple, affecting, and in a somewhat antique taste [*d’un goût un peu antique*].”²⁰ Johann Georg Sulzer in his eighteenth century *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* described the content of the instrumental romance as a “narrative” in a slow tempo that is “passionate,” “tragic,” or “sentimental,” and “the theme and the expression must be of utmost simplicity, and naïve in the extreme.”²¹ The one feature of the romance that has persisted over the centuries, along with its lyrical and tender character, is its suggestion of romance or antiquity. This last is an important point to keep in mind with respect to Beethoven's *Larghetto*: The *sentimental* aspect of the romance recalls the *antique* aspect of the chaconne.

²⁰ Quoted in Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 162.

²¹ Quoted in Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 161; Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 79. See also Owen Jander, “Exploring Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie* as a source used by Beethoven”, *Beethoven Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1987), 1–7.

6. Comment on Jander's interpretation of "the dialogue"

Jander refers to a number of Beethoven's previous compositions which contain programmatic elements, and suggests that the Violin Concerto is another such composition. In Jander's view, a dialogue between the piano and the orchestra in the Piano Concerto in G Major, Opus 58, exemplifies the "Power of Song," which, as Jander explains, "was to become a favorite theme during the first half of the nineteenth century."²² Jander believes that the second movement of the Violin Concerto, which was composed shortly after the G Major Piano Concerto, reflects this same subject matter. But Jander refrains from exploring why Beethoven would want to treat the *same exact thematic territory* twice in a row in the same year.

Jander describes the *Larghetto* as a drama ("a dispute in dialogue") in which the orchestra repeatedly sings a song, Theme A (the chaconne/*Romanze*), ultimately winning over a tentative solo violin, which finally embraces the spirit of Theme A and sings the song for itself, leading to the apotheosis of a "sublime" "transfiguration." But Jander, in his bar-by-bar commentary on the movement, fails to explore the concept of the slowed-down dance (chaconne). The question that cries out for recognition is: *what can it mean, to have a slowed-down dance as the basis of the movement?* Moreover, Jander early on quotes Sulzer's description of a chaconne ("passionate," "tragic," "sentimental"), but then he fails to utilize a single one of these concepts in his own commentary on the narrative. The one adjective, along with "simple" and "naïve," that is common to *both* the Sulzer and Rousseau extracts as quoted by Jander is—"tragic." Indeed, Jander quotes Rousseau's description of a romance as an "often tragic story" not once but *twice*, but he then fails to integrate the concept of tragedy in even the slightest way in his own commentary.

²² Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 173.

A fresh look at the narrative aspect of the *Larghetto* is warranted; and what is required is, first and foremost, a recognition of some principal structural elements not mentioned by either Jander or Stowell.

7. Some principal structural elements of the *Larghetto*

a. The restful element of Theme A

The simplicity and unchanging tonality (G major) of the serene second movement follows the groundbreaking large-scale *Allegro ma non troppo* first movement.²³ Many commentators, as Stowell notes, have recognized the *Larghetto*'s "static harmonic plan."²⁴ After the extensive, exciting first movement, with its succession of key changes and its dense and clever recurrence and adaptations of small structural elements, and which at 535 bars is as long as an entire three-movement violin concerto of Beethoven's day, the simply designed second movement comes as a rest. The concerto's orchestra is reduced for the *Larghetto*: the flute, oboes, trumpets, and timpani are silent. The violins, contributing to the quiet, restful character, play *con sordino* throughout (until the final bars, 88–91). The solo violin, except for a *crescendo* at bb. 28–29 and two moments of *fortissimo* punctuation (bb. 30 and 91), has no other word directions concerning dynamics except for *pianissimo* (b. 63) and *pianississimo* (b. 86). Roger Fiske notes that "The music sustains throughout the same mood of absolute stillness."²⁵ Tovey speaks of the movement's "sublime inaction" and describes its "state of repose" as "dreamlike."²⁶ The restful element of the *Larghetto* is a fundamental aspect of its narrative.

²³ "Unchanging," until the final four bars when the key modulates to D major.

²⁴ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 75.

²⁵ Fiske, *Beethoven's Concertos and Overtures*, 31.

²⁶ Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Volume III Concertos*, 93

Theme A has its roots in the chaconne. A chaconne, we recall, is a cheerful dance generally characterized by a quick tempo. But a dance, when its tempo is slowed down, becomes something quite different from its original character. Theme A is not “just” a larghetto theme; owing to its chaconne connection, we can say that it is a larghetto theme that “might have been,” say, allegro. What can it mean, this slowed-down theme that might have been something else?

1. *The dance slowed down has become almost a lullaby.* A dance is merry and enlivening, but when dramatically reduced in tempo becomes static and monotonous. Theme A may be a chaconne slowed-down to a romance, but Theme A as it stands also has the repetitive, soothing quality of a lullaby. Characteristics of a lullaby include a gentle, descending melody and an archaic aspect, and both of these reflect well the nature of Theme A. Two significant works of the genre, Chopin’s *Berceuse in D-flat major* and Liszt’s *Berceuse*, include moments that suggest rocking; Liszt evokes this through the use of triplets in common time. *The solo violin of Beethoven’s Larghetto indeed uses rocking-sound-type semiquavers and demisemiquavers in bb. 17–19 and 27–29.* I write “so-called” because I am not suggesting that Beethoven means us to think of babies in cradles: all I am suggesting is that there is a stylistic correspondence between Beethoven’s slowed-down chaconne and the lullaby.

The time of day when one is most likely to hear a lullaby, as well as feel most tired after a day’s exertion (i.e., the first movement) is most obviously—*the evening*. Movements 1 and 3 with their bustle and episodic nature have something of the “light” about them; the simple, spare *Larghetto*, in contrast, has something of the “dark” about it. *After the daylight of the first movement, now we experience the spacious night of the Larghetto.*

(To the best of my knowledge, Donald Francis Tovey is the only musicologist who suggests, albeit indirectly, this nighttime aspect, when he equates the “slow and solemn” *Larghetto* with “the nature of dreams” and the “dreamlike,” and remarks how the

final gesture of the unmuted strings in the coda (bb. 88–91) prompts us to “awaken in the light of common day.”²⁷)

2. A slowed-down dance conveys a mood at odds with the proper mood of a dance played at its proper tempo. What might have been sprightly and jocular is now slow and contemplative. A dance that is slowed down has, for this reason, a brooding quality. Theme A, based on an antique style, is a memory of an old tradition, and hence can evoke the concept of “lost time” or “faded dreams” or “what might have been.” There is something *nostalgic* and *wistful* about the *Larghetto*.

3. Night is the time when one, if sleepless and alone, can become pensive and reflective. The *Larghetto* conveys the feeling of being left with one’s thoughts in the dark stillness of the night. In French opera, the chaconne was often employed to convey a hero’s celebratory triumph; but the slowed-down chaconne can be heard as an *intentional* antithesis to this.²⁸ In the midst of what Maynard Solomon described as Beethoven’s “Heroic Decade” (1803–1813), the time when, in Scott Burnham’s words, Beethoven produced a series of “heroic-style works,” Beethoven composed a movement, the *Larghetto*, that subverts or undercuts the theme of the apotheosis of the hero.²⁹

4. Theme A, repeated four times, can represent the spectre of the past, of times gone by—in short, the theme can represent the immutable passage of time itself. In keeping with this, the principal theme can be described as the “Weight of the World” theme. The most basic way of describing its character is: that which cannot be entirely overcome, but only reckoned with—“*The Implacable*.”

²⁷ Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Volume III Concertos*, 93, 94.

²⁸ For Beethoven’s affinity with French music at the time that he composed his Violin Concerto, see, for example, Boris Schwarz, “Beethoven and the French Violin School”, *The Musical Quarterly* 44 (Oct., 1958), 431–47.

²⁹ Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* (London: Granada, 1980), 183; Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 158.

b. Orchestra and Soloist in Part I

The structure of Part I is built of two fundamental, contrasting components which can lead to a so-called divided attention on the part of the listener. The orchestral element reiterating the slow-paced Theme A conveys a tranquil mood; indeed, the repetition of a slow and steady melody, such as in a lullaby, can convey a calming or even soporific effect. That the first three manifestations of Theme A are played softly contributes to the sedate atmosphere (in bb. 1–10 the strings play *pianissimo*; in bb. 10–20 one clarinet and the two horns play *piano* and *dolce*; in bb. 20–30 one bassoon, along with the violas and cellos play *piano* and *dolce*). The solo violin, meanwhile, represents a quantum of dynamism in the midst of this stately calm, and can be equated with a lone voice awake and pensive in the night. It is a truism that solemn thoughts can come easier in the nighttime (hence phrases such as “whatever gets you through the night”). Part I of the *Larghetto* can put the listener into two minds, as it were: the orchestra is the “lulling” element, while the solo violin is the “wakefulness” element.

c. The trill in the Violin Concerto

Commentators on Beethoven’s Violin Concerto have only rarely considered the structural relationships between the second movement and the first and third movements. However, an examination of at least one style element between these three—the use of the trill—can help to better understand the *Larghetto*. Of all the musicologists referenced in this paper, only Tovey and Graham Williams comment on the use of trills throughout the Violin Concerto. Williams notes that “Trills are used

significantly” but goes no further than that, while Tovey’s more pointed statement will be mentioned below.³⁰

I. Trills in Movements I and III

What follows are nine examples of trill episodes as played by the solo violin in the first and third movements, and in every case a trill signals a progression from one main structural section to another; and in the majority of the cases a trill also signals a shift in mood. (I will refer at times to “trill episodes,” as in some places a sequence of trills act as one structural unit.) This especial point cannot be overstressed: Of the five trill episodes as played by the solo violin in the first movement, *every trill episode serves as a transition moment, joining together two significant sections of the overall structure.*³¹

What I term an “octave trill” is a shift from one trilled note to a companion trilled note an octave higher or lower. Every instance of an octave trill in the Violin Concerto signals a transition into a new major structural section. (i.) In the first movement, at bb. 329–330, the principal violin shifts up from *a'* to *a''*, which serves as the segue from a *forte* crescendo to the *piano* episode that is the most gentle, wistful and poignant section of the first movement (and which George Grove calls “one of the most affecting passages in all music”³²). (ii) In the first movement, at bb. 416–421, the principal violin shifts down from *a''* to *a'*, which serves as the segue between two sections of the Third Solo³³, joining a vivid passage played by the principal violin which includes *forte* phrases, to the *dolce* return of the second theme as played *piano* by the woodwinds. (iii.) In the third movement, at bb. 268–271, the principal violin shifts up from *a''* to *a'''*, which

³⁰ Williams, *Beethoven Violin Concerto in D Major*, Op. 61, 18.

³¹ The other trill moments in the first movement are: timpani at bb. 72, 79–80, 83–84, 367, 371 (all decorative), and 510 (a transitional moment leading to cadenza); and the first violins at b. 245 (decorative).

³² Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

³³ I am using Stowell’s breakdown of the first movement. See Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 62, 65.

serves as the segue from *piano* passagework (marked *dimin.*) to the *fortissimo* tutti and the cadenza.³⁴

Beethoven uses other, so to speak, “trills shifts,” which are not octave trills, but which still serve the same function as the octave trill: as a transition moment between sections. (iv.) In the first movement, at bb. 205–216, the extended trill phrase of *b*” up to *c*” up to *c*#” up to *d*” up to *d*#” up to *e*”, is the climactic moment of the Solo Exposition (or, First Solo) and leads, via a shorter connecting passage of scale figures, to the next large-scale section of the movement (Ritornello 2), which commences with the full orchestra reprising earlier material *fortissimo*. (v.) In the first movement, at bb. 479–490, the extended trill phrase of *e*” up to *f*” up to *f*#” up to *g*” up to *g*#” up to *a*”, is the climactic moment of the Third Solo section of the movement, and leads, via six bars of scale figures, to a short section of the full orchestra (Ritornello 4) reprising an earlier theme *fortissimo*. (vi.) In the third movement, at b. 92, the shift down from *g*” to *c*#” serves as a sudden breaking off from a crescendo segment which concludes Section B1, and acts as a segue into Section A2, which begins with a reprise of the opening theme of the movement, with the principal violin playing *tenuto* (for example, b. 93) and then *delicatamente* (bb. 102–103). (vii.) In the third movement, at bb. 280–291, the shift down from *e*” to *e-flat*” serves as the segue from the cadenza to the coda.

Here are two further examples of how trills in the Violin Concerto serve as a transition moment: (viii.) In the first movement, at b. 510, the solo violin’s trill on *e*’ is the signal to the orchestra that the cadenza has concluded. (ix.) In the third movement, at bb. 308–309, the solo violin plays an *e*” trill, which leads to a five-bar phrase played

³⁴ For the first time in the concerto, the octave trill doesn’t lead to a *dolce* or wistful moment. This time, it serves, so to speak, as a “holding one’s head up in the face of adversity” feeling, a decisive renunciation of the use of the octave trill up to this climactic moment.

pianissimo which is the final wistful moment of the concerto and which segues into the last, and exhilarating, section of the coda.³⁵

II. Trills in the *Larghetto*

As in movements one and three, the two octave trills in the *Larghetto* serve as a segue between sections. (i.) bb. 52–53. *a'* up to *a''*. After the soloist's wistful Theme B, the octave trill leads into the *cantabile* treatment of Theme A (bb. 56–65). (ii.) b. 78. *d'''* down two octaves to *d'*. After the soloist's reprise of Theme B, the octave trill leads to a poignant restatement of Theme C. This is the first time in the concerto that an octave trill joins together two very similar moods rather than serving as a harbinger of a shift in mood. This two octave drop is also the most precipitous drop of all of the trills in the concerto.

The other trills in the *Larghetto* are: (iii.) b. 14. Trill on *f#'''* leads to no change in mood, nor joins two main structural sections. (iv.) b. 24. Trill on *f#'''* leads to no change in mood, nor joins two main structural sections. (v.) b. 74. Trill on *c'* is a decorative trill in the Classical style. (vi.) b. 91. Trill on *g''*, played *fortissimo*, leads to the short cadenza joining together the second and third movements. This trill is the pivot point of a significant shift of mood, and hence is indicative of Beethoven's primary use of the trill in the Violin Concerto.

³⁵ That a decorative trill is integrated into the main theme of the third movement (for example, bb. 0–4, with the trill at b. 4) is a highly interesting structural factor which should be addressed elsewhere. If, as I have described, the trill in the Violin Concerto is most generally allied with moments of structural change, then to acknowledge how the trill is integrated into the rondo allegro main theme of the third movement can lead one to interpret that theme as a “reconciliation” with the narrative material that preceded it (particularly the “darkness” of the second movement).

III. Commentary on the use of the trill in the *Larghetto*

The trills in the Violin Concerto, primarily the octave trills and trill shifts, most often signify, and especially in the first movement, a moment of transition between two well-defined sections. However, of the six trill episodes in the *Larghetto*, four (bb. 14, 24, 74, 78) *serve as no transitional element nor lead to a change in mood*; while two (bb. 52–53 and 91) do serve as a transitional element.

When we consider the trills at bb. 14, 24 and 78 in this way, George Grove’s comment on the “beseeching, yearning tone” of the solo violin takes on further plausibility. At each of these three moments the soloist “seeks” (in a poetic or “psychological” sense) a shift in mood, but it does not come. Each of the three trills in question is a “reaching moment” that “fails.” Whereas every use of the soloist’s trill in the first movement indicated a transition point, the trill in b. 14 of the second movement leads to a tentative *ad. lib.* “breaking-off” phrase, and then, in bb. 15–16, to a variation of the solo violin’s opening gestures at bb. 11–12; in other words, instead of acting as a segue into a fresh structural component, the trill, for the first time in the concerto, leads to a *backtrack* (so that we can say the “first sentence” of the solo violin, bb. 10–14, leads nowhere in particular). The trill episode at b. 24 works in a similar way to the trill at b. 14.³⁶ The trill episode at b. 78 connects two different structural sections together, but as these two sections share a similar tone (poignant, wistful), the quality of the “failed trill” applies here as well; the trill at b. 78 seeks a “rising up” out of the prevailing tone, yet becomes a cadential trill, and the prevailing tone wins out.

The trill episode at bb. 52–53 *does* signal a transition point dividing broad structural sections. It is in reference to this specific trill that Tovey writes, in what is the most extensive comment on the use of trills in the Violin Concerto that I have come

³⁶ *Trill episode*, because a variation of the *ad. lib.* phrase from b. 14 is also trilled in b. 24.

across: “This trill behaves like all the cadential trills in this concerto; that is to say, instead of ending conventionally, it mounts aloft and leaves us awhile in doubt about what is going to happen.”³⁷ Indeed, the trill suggests a cadential trill yet the resolution remains suspended in favor of a transitional passage of bb. 54–55 leading into the high point of the *Larghetto*, bb. 56–65, the final reprise of Theme A, which is performed primarily by the solo violin in an ornamented and, compared to the rest of the movement, sprightly manner.

The trill at b. 91 is the solo violin’s last word in the movement before the cadenza. Played *fortissimo*, it is the solo violin’s most emphatic moment (along with b. 30) in the *Larghetto*. It is as if, after the implacably spare quality of the movement (in contrast to the complexity of the first movement), the soloist, letting off steam or even crying out as it were, demands the transition into the lively finale. The final trill is a suspended ending that is only resolved with the start of the Rondo.

d. Two-part structure: the “Edifice” and the “Beyond”

George Grove offers a crucial clue to the general two-part structure of the *Larghetto*: “After having heard the theme played through [Theme A, bb. 1–10], it is difficult to understand how anything else can be worthy to come after it. Beethoven knows this well, and in consideration to this feeling repeats the theme no less than four consecutive times.”³⁸ Grove suggests that the ten-bar Theme A is a well-rounded, finished piece of its own; and for the purposes of my discussion his most significant words are: “*how can anything else be worthy to come after it[?]*” Jander agrees with Grove’s general point, describing how Beethoven ends Theme A in an “extremely conclusive manner” (as opposed to

³⁷ Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Volume III Concertos*, 94.

³⁸ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

traditional chaconne tetrachordal basses which end on a rhythmically weak cadence). Both Jander and Stowell use the word “masculine” to describe the cadence of bb. 8–10 of Theme A.³⁹ Obviously, although Theme A ends in its “extremely conclusive manner” four times in a row, the movement continues for a further 51 bars.

The phrase “extremely conclusive manner” is crucial to understanding the narrative of the movement. Bar 10 is not only the firm and decisive ending to the main theme, but subsequent variations on bar 10 come to represent, in bb. 41–43, 65–69, and 81–82, the abstract concept of “*an* ending” or “*the* ending.” In Part II, the “extremely conclusive” closing moment of Theme A transforms into a motif representing *the spectre of ending*.

First, however, I must speak of the two-part structure of the *Larghetto*. Theme A and its two succeeding manifestations (bb. 1–30) build to a climactic *forte* reiteration of Theme A (bb. 30–40) which concludes Part I. If Grove, Jander, and Stowell are correct about the extremely conclusive ending-ness to Theme A, then the remainder of the movement, Part II of the *Larghetto*, bb. 40–91, may indeed be described as taking place “after an end.”

The orchestra demonstrates two completely different qualities in the *Larghetto*. In Part I, the orchestra dominates the structure, repeating Theme A four times and conditioning the responses of the solo violin. Part I can be described as “the Edifice.” That is to say, the orchestra “includes” or is an “enclosure” around the solo violin (in a manner of speaking, a *psychological enclosure*, if we accept the concept that the slowed-down chaconne suggests an Implacable that cannot be gotten around but only reckoned with). In Part I, it is the orchestra that presents, and re-presents, the main thematic material.

In Part II, however, the orchestra has a completely different role to play. After bar 39, it is the solo violin that dominates the structure, while the orchestra, until the last

³⁹ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 170; Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 83.

four bars of the coda, serves simply as a *piano* or *pianissimo* background accompaniment, as orchestral color. (Stowell, writing of bb. 45–55, for example, describes the orchestral backdrop to the soloist’s melody as “the quietest and most slow-moving of string accompaniments.”⁴⁰ Jander, meanwhile, describing bb. 56–65, refers to the orchestral strings as “the most delicate accompaniment possible.”⁴¹) In Part II, the creation and development of thematic material rests solely with the solo violin, which is left alone as it were to work through a “state-of-mind” inaugurated by the repetitive Theme A of Part I.

Part II is the “Beyond” (the “after an end”) where the solo violin is, as it were, out on a limb, a solitary character occupying a spacious stillness. “Wandering free” is how Antony Hopkins describes the solo violin of the second half of the *Larghetto*.⁴² The spare orchestration of Part II, its “open-air spaciousness” (as opposed to the firm, conclusive, and, in a manner of speaking, claustrophobic Theme A of Part I), led both George Grove and Jander to think of exterior places when listening to the *Larghetto*, especially to bb. 65–70. “The lovely melody,” wrote Grove of these measures, “. . . seem[s] to suggest the ‘calm and deep peace’ of a lovely autumn day.” Jander remarked on the same moment: “one is reminded of those contemporaneous landscape paintings, in which the figure of the observer of the Romantic scene is so often discovered sharing his contemplations of Nature with some beloved companion.”⁴³ While I would rather describe the aural spaciousness of Part II as the open-endedness of the night, I am in agreement with Grove and Jander that Part II of the *Larghetto* suggests, due to Beethoven’s masterful scoring, “outsideness.”

⁴⁰ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 77.

⁴¹ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 176.

⁴² Hopkins, *Seven Concertos of Beethoven*, 81.

⁴³ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 177.

e. The “End Motif”

George Grove described the *Larghetto* as the “heights of ideal calm.”⁴⁴ But I think there is something more wistful or even tragic taking place. Part I is characterized by what can be described as the brooding pace of a slowed-down dance, while Part II is haunted by the *spectre of ending*.

The last bar of the “extremely conclusive ending” of Theme A, b. 10, features the strings playing a G major chord three times. The three instances of Theme A that follow (bb. 10–30) all end in ways very similar to b. 10.⁴⁵ However, the fourth instance of Theme A ends in a markedly different manner. At the conclusion of bb. 30–40, which is the final manifestation of Theme A in Part I, a variation of bar 10 is played by the clarinets, bassoons, and the strings. I term this variation, which is stretched out for four bars (bb. 40–43), the first appearance of the “End Motif” in Part II of the *Larghetto*. Here, the G major chord which closes out Part I is played five times in four bars, and in the process “leaks” or “stretches” into Part II; the end moment keeps on going as it were, and metamorphoses from the final moments of a main structural section into a discrete, “free-floating” theme-in-itself. For the rest of the movement, this G major chord, as played primarily by the woodwinds and the horns, will accompany the solo violin as the spectre of “an ending” or “the ending.” *In Part II, the G major chord as played by the orchestra can be understood as representing the abstract concept of “ending” itself.*

(i.) In bb. 40–43, while the solo violin, now left alone as it were by the full orchestra, “searches” for a melodic theme via a *dolce* variation of its opening phrases (from bb. 11–12), the End Motif repeatedly sounds *piano* in the background. The last chord of Part I persists as it were into Part II, as if the End Motif is suggesting, via the

⁴⁴ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

⁴⁵ The primary difference between the instances is, in each particular occurrence, the slightly altered orchestration of the G major chord among the strings.

quietly emphatic repetition of its static harmony, that the movement should end here, but the solo violin, unheeding, continues on “all by its lonesome.”

(ii.) After the climax of Part II, when the solo violin plays a *cantabile* variation of Theme A (bb. 56–65), the End Motif immediately appears as a riposte to the sudden “brightening spirits” of the soloist: the horns repeat a dotted rhythmic figure (in octave D) three times (bb. 65–67), then complete one last phrase marked *cresc.* (bb. 68–69) which recalls the protracted structure of the End Motif of bb. 40–43. String support (*pianissimo*) integrates the horns in a G major chord.

George Grove, referring to the lovely, wistful centerpiece of the first movement (bb. 331–357), remarked: “the repeated notes of the horns, bassoons and trumpets, hushed to their lowest, and sounding in their monotonous iteration like the knell of all earthly troubles and annoyances.”⁴⁶ But in my estimation this description—“*the repeated notes . . . sounding in their monotonous iteration like the knell of all earthly troubles and annoyances*”—works much better as a perfect description of the horns of the End Motif!

(iii.) After the solo violin’s trill moment in b. 78 which leads to no change in mood, the horns repeat the End Motif for four bars (79–82), again supported by a G major accompaniment by the strings. Once again the solo violin yearns to break out from the prevailing mood but is countered (or shadowed) by the End Motif.

(iv.) During the opening bars of the coda, as the solo violin begins its rise toward the upper registers, a G major chord is played three times by the strings, recalling the End Motif (bb. 84–85).

⁴⁶ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

Note on the Horns' Dotted Figure

Stowell points out that the horns' dotted figure (e.g., in bb. 65–67) recalls the first three notes of Theme A, a correspondence which recalls T.S. Eliot's "In my beginning is my end" from his *Four Quartets*.⁴⁷ Indeed, the rhythmic figure returns in a double-dotted variation at the end of the movement, in the final *fortissimo* flourish of the orchestra in bb. 88–91.

The dotted figure of bb. 65–67 first appears during the final manifestation of Theme A in Part I (bb. 31–32; 34–36). Just when the soloist is "coming to life" as it were for the first time in the *Larghetto* (via a rising scale figure spanning three octaves, b. 30), a *forte* reiteration of Theme A ("The Implacable") reduces the soloist to silence and introduces—and in the process reiterates six times—what will become a version of Part II's End Motif. Jander describes the dotted figure (as played by the clarinets, bassoons, and horns) at this point as having "a strong tone of insistence."⁴⁸ This dotted figure transforms into the first instance of the End Motif in Part II (bb. 40–43).

It may be significant that the three-note End Motif as played by the horns is, in terms of its number of notes, a truncated variety of both the five-note "life-giving" timpani motif of the first movement ("life-giving" insofar as the timpani motif is integrated via a variety of ingenious means in over half of the 535 bars of the *Allegro ma non troppo*), and the five-note figure that is the basis of the main theme of the third movement (e.g., b. 1).

A stylistic predecessor to the End Motif is the famous horn call that comes in the midst of the first movement of the *Eroica* symphony (bb. 394–395), a composition that was completed two years prior to the Violin Concerto. Scott Burnham in *Beethoven Hero* describes the horn call—drawing upon an earlier interpretation by Adolph Bernhard

⁴⁷ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 78.

⁴⁸ Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 175.

Marx—as a “mysterious utterance” that conveys both “a warning from the past” and “a premonition of the future”; the horn call is “a reminder of destiny.”⁴⁹ Similarly, Walter Riezler describes the *Eroica*’s horn call as coming “from afar.”⁵⁰ In both the first movement of the *Eroica* and the second movement of the Violin Concerto, time past and time future coincide in the evocative horn call. However, the difference between the two uses is crucial. Whereas in the heroic Third Symphony the horn call “summons the hero into action once again,”⁵¹ the horn call in the *Larghetto* is no rousing call to action, but serves rather as a haunting, chastening reminder of the fact of time itself (lost beginnings and last endings) amid what Tovey described as the “sublime inaction” of the movement.

Both Jander and George Grove speak of a pastoral atmosphere to the *Larghetto*; according to Jander, “this pastoral quality emerges most clearly from Beethoven’s use of the horns.”⁵² Heard in this way, the horns suggest the rounding up or calling home of persons or animals in a rustic scene. The abstract concept of “calling home” can indeed relate to the character of the “End Motif.”

8. The Narrative of the *Larghetto*

What follows is but one way of characterizing the movement: The *Larghetto* is a journey equivalent to a dark night of the soul. Here is an outline of the basic structure of the *Larghetto*, with my own terminology on the right:

PART ONE

The Implacable; or, “The Edifice”

bars 1–10: Theme A

The Implacable Theme

⁴⁹ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, 14; 16.

⁵⁰ Walter Riezler, *Beethoven* (London: M. C. Forrester, 1938), 271.

⁵¹ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, 18.

⁵² Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 164.

bars 10–20: Reprise 1 of Theme A	Soloist: The Reaching Theme
bars 20–30: Reprise 2 of Theme A	Soloist: The Reaching Theme
bars 30–40: Reprise 3 of Theme A	The Implacable Theme
PART TWO	
	<i>The Beyond</i> , or, “The Open”
bars 40–44: Ornamental extension	Soloist: The Reaching Theme
bars 45–55: Theme B	The Pensive Theme
bars 55–65: Reprise 4 of Theme A	Chaconne
bars 65–70: Theme C	The Tragic Theme
bars 71–9: Reprise of Theme B (elaborated)	The Pensive Theme
bars 79–83: Reprise of Theme C	The Tragic Theme
bars 83–91: Coda	Together: The Reaching Theme/The Implacable Theme

My terms, which are employed primarily for the sake of convenience, are not purely subjective but are distillations of previous interpretative accounts. For example, the concept of “reaching” relates to the word “beseeching” as used by George Grove; “The Open” is consonant with reflections by Grove, Jander, and Antony Hopkins; “tragic” derives specifically from commentary by Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Georg Sulzer; and “pensive” relates to descriptions by Jander (“meditative”) and Stowell (“reminisces”). By no means through the use of these terms of convenience do I intend to present a programmatic interpretation. I am following the strategy of Burnham in *Beethoven Hero* where he comments that programmatic criticism can serve as an initial aid to approach, but not to explain, a work:

programmatic criticism is metaphorically suggestive of underlying and archetypal processes. These more or less universal paradigms are evoked in response to the intense engagement many listeners feel when confronted with the music of Beethoven; the narrative programs that evince these patterns serve as a way of communicating the spirit of such an engagement.⁵³

PART I: Measures 1–10: Theme A

The Weight of the World theme, or the sound of The Implacable, is introduced. Stowell refers to its “pregnant silences,” thereby implying that the theme suggests content of significant import.⁵⁴ The mood is serene, with the strings playing *pianissimo* and the violins muted. After the grand and energetic first movement, now the concerto enters an extended reflective phase. The chaconne bass evokes a vanished past. There is something almost morose about a merry dance reduced to a tempo slower than walking pace. We recall aspects of Sulzer’s definition of the narrative of a romance: “sentimental,” “tragic”; also from Grove’s: “lyrical character,” with “connotations of love and antiquity”; and Rousseau’s: “affecting,” “tragic.” Throughout, the solo violin remains silent. The theme ends in its “extremely conclusive manner.” Is it surprising that an extremely conclusive ending appears so soon, at only the tenth bar of the movement? Perhaps the movement itself is in part about endings (times gone by, limits)?

⁵³ Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, 25–26

⁵⁴ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 76.

Measures 10–20: Reprise 1 of Theme A

The Implacable theme is played again, this time by the horns (bb. 10–12) and then the first clarinet supported by the violins (bb. 11–20) and then also the violas (bb. 16–20); the orchestral theme this time is marked not *pianissimo* but *piano*.

The solo violin enters in b. 11. Whereas in the first movement the solo violin is predominantly energetic and robust, in the second movement it remains mostly gentle and delicate. In bar 11 the soloist and the orchestra are both marked *dolce*. There is, however, a wistful quality to the sweetness. That the violin enters off-beat, after a semiquaver rest, suggests a subtle tension, a disequilibrium. Jander describes the off-beat gestures of the solo violin as suggesting “sensitive response,” but what sort of response?⁵⁵ Is the soloist acting in the manner of a dance partner being led, as Stowell suggests (“The soloist’s role is decorative, adding a descant”⁵⁶)? Or is the solo violin now the center of attention, with the emphasis not on The Implacable theme, but on the phrases of the solo violin? (The solo violin is playing at moderate volume over the orchestra playing *piano*.) One way of approaching the interplay of orchestra and soloist is this: the solo violin is not “working with” The Implacable theme, but The Implacable theme is “working on” the solo violin (just as one’s memories and reveries can affect a person’s mood and generate an emotional response). The solo violin’s response to Theme A can be described as the Reaching Theme.

The opening bars of the Reaching Theme (bb. 11–12) consist of a figure that rises an octave and is played twice. Then comes a passage to a trill and an *ad. lib.* breaking off of the first phrase (bb. 13–14). The trill leads not to a new structural division, but to a falling back, as the Reaching Theme returns, this time in a higher-pitched variation (bb.

⁵⁵ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 174.

⁵⁶ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 76.

15–16). The last note of each instance of the Reaching Theme, which is also the highest note of each figure, is marked *tenuto*, so that in some performances each last, highest note can be held slightly longer than full value, which can correspond to a musing that is wistful, a reaching out that lightly fades away. These early gestures of the violin are primarily an upward movement. Perfectly appropriate is George Grove’s description of the solo violin in the *Larghetto*: “beseeching.” Beseeching—to entreat, to ask earnestly for, to reach out for, to seek after. Stowell indirectly refers to this seeking after and then breaking off, when he remarks that the soloist doesn’t “take up the role of melodist for the first time in the movement” until bb. 45–55.⁵⁷ After four gestures of “reaching up” in six bars, now comes the “down-to-earth” final four bars. All is as delicate as a feather floating slowly downwards. If one chooses to hear a rocking-type element to the semiquavers and demisemiquavers in bb. 17–19, the passage may evoke aspects of the *sentimental*. In the last bar, b. 20, the soloist plays an arpeggiated G major chord, which distinctly echoes the “extremely conclusive ending” of bb. 9–10 of Theme A. The tonal fall of b. 20 (the soloist descends an octave) is in direct antithesis to the Reaching Theme, and hence suggests a shrug or sigh.

Measures 20–30: Reprise 2 of Theme A

The Implacable Theme is played primarily by the first bassoon, supported by the strings; the orchestral dynamic is still *piano* (b. 20–30). The soloist plays a variation of the Reaching Theme, which, composed now of sextuplets, has become more elaborate, making the soloist sound more emphatic this time (Jander says, “a bit more rhapsodic”⁵⁸). The last note of each figure of the Reaching Theme is no longer marked *tenuto* (bb. 21–

⁵⁷ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 77.

⁵⁸ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 174.

22; 25–26). But again a trill (b. 24) leads to nothing more than a breaking off and then a restatement, in a higher pitch, of the Reaching Theme (bb. 25–26). The delicate rocking theme that follows is also denser; back in bb. 18–19, it was built of two figures of four semiquavers each and four figures of four demisemiquavers each; now, in b. 28, the rocking theme is built of two figures of eight demisemiquavers each, and, in b. 29, four figures of seven demisemiquavers each. Grove describes these figures as “astonishingly graceful.”⁵⁹ Yet it is not the grace of the full-bodied athlete but rather that of the tender ballerina. By this point the soloist has gotten somewhat worked up, as the final bar of this episode, b. 30, is dominated by the soloist’s rising scale figure marked *fortissimo*. This upward reaching that spans three octaves is the soloist’s steepest rise in the *Larghetto*. Suddenly the violin has become assertive, recalling the energy and volume of the first movement. The scale figure carries a suggestion of a “railing against,” a “shaking a fist at,” a “crying out.” But what is the response?

Measures 30–40: Reprise 3 of Theme A

Here is the fourth restatement of The Implacable, played tutti and at its loudest, *forte*. Jander speaks of the orchestration of the woodwind choir as conveying “a strong tone of insistence” (bb. 31–32; 34–36).⁶⁰ The soloist remains silent throughout—as if chastened by The Implacable?

This climactic reiteration of The Implacable theme restates the “extremely conclusive ending” first heard in b. 10. Moreover, it introduces via the insistent woodwind choir what will be the horns’ version of the End Motif. Furthermore, it leads to the first appearance of the End Motif in Part II: the G major chord as repeated five

⁵⁹ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

⁶⁰ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 175.

times by the clarinets and bassoons in bb. 40–43. This reprise is also the last orchestral *tutti* manifestation of the theme, and serves as the end of Part I of the movement. In five ways, then, this last instance of The Implacable concerns “endings.” But the *Larghetto* is still a little less than half over.

PART II: Measures 40–44: Ornamental extension

Now that the *Larghetto*’s full orchestra has fallen silent, the solo violin is “abandoned” to its own thoughts. It is primarily the spare orchestration of Part II, along with the delicacy of the soloist, that suggests the openness and quiet of the nighttime. This short section is an interlude between two larger structural passages, as if the solo violin, “all alone” in the “night,” is as yet unsure how to proceed, and is treading water as it were for five bars. (Jander observes, “The solo violin . . . seems to drift off into a private world of contemplation.”⁶¹) The soloist, still “searching,” plays a variation of the Reaching Theme composed of rising *dolce* arabesques (bb. 40–42), which is in wistful contrast to the energetic scale figure of b. 30. Four times the soloist reaches upwards; meanwhile, the End Motif is heard *piano* in the background, a haunting reminder of endings (both past and future) and limitations. As the last manifestation of the End Motif is played (b. 43), the solo violin breaks off from the Reaching Theme and gently descends three octaves via semiquavers (vaguely recalling the rocking theme) and a diminuendo—and this is the steepest fall of the *Larghetto*—to where, as Stowell points out, the soloist assumes the “role of melodist for the first time in the movement.”⁶²

⁶¹ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 175.

⁶² Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, p. 77.

Measures 45–55: Theme B

The solo violin presents a *cantabile* melody over an orchestra playing *pianissimo* that has now become a peaceful background (bb. 45–52). The soloist’s melody is a wistful thought of the lonely soul in the night. (Jander describes it as a “musical idea of singularly meditative character,” while Stowell describes the mood as “still and serene.”⁶³) This melody may be described as The Pensive Theme. Beethoven marked the score *sul G e D*: the low, rich tones of the lower strings are meant to bring out the lugubrious aspect of the melody (and are in contrast to the higher registers of the Reaching Theme). As if the wistful melody has “worked up” the soloist, now comes an octave trill and then an ascending then descending scale passage that leads to the climax of the movement.

Measures 56–65: Reprise 4 of Theme A

The soloist sings a rhythmically syncopated variation of Theme A with pizzicato support from the strings. Entering on the off-beat adds urgency and drive to the melody. This restatement of the original theme, played at a higher, so to speak ethereal pitch, is finally almost sprightly, as if this was what Theme A, in a manner of speaking, should have been or was: a chaconne. *Almost* sprightly—because the score is marked, for both the soloist and the strings, at bb. 57–58, *sempre perdendosi*, “always gradually dying away.” A brighter mood associated with a dance (happiness, liveliness) is suggested, but not quite attained. Still and all, at the heart of the soloist’s dark night of the soul, this variation conveys some light and optimism. It can be equated to a beloved thought or memory that makes one wistfully smile. “Interestingly enough,” Jander comments, “the soloist does add to

⁶³ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 176; Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 77.

the melody the only ornamentation to which it is subjected in this entire movement.”⁶⁴ While Jander sees the soloist as the center of attention in this episode, Stowell, in contrast, describes the soloist as contributing “embroidery” to the violins’ treatment of Theme A as well as “sometimes shadowing” the violins.⁶⁵ The soloist plays the “extremely conclusive ending” *pianissimo* (bb. 63–65). The moment of riding a high as it were is over.

Measures 65–70: Theme C

The End Motif returns via the horns playing *pianissimo* (bb. 65–69), a sober riposte to the soloist’s momentary lift of spirits. The soloist follows the first expression of the End Motif in b. 65 with a lyrical phrase that builds to an orchestral *crescendo* in b. 68 which falls immediately to *piano* in b. 69. This poignant melody can be equated with a mild emotional outburst (e.g., a reflective response to the chaconne-memory). Jander writes: “The solo violin now introduces a second idea of its own, even more gentle and introspective than the one before.”⁶⁶ George Grove described these measures thus: “The effect of this is too charming.”⁶⁷ Charming, but not in an upbeat, walking among the flowers sense; more the “charm” of how an inward reverie charms and enchants. Recalling Sulzer and Rousseau one more time, we might define this the Tragic Theme. The outburst is fleeting; the melody falls away into a connecting passage of semiquavers (bb. 68–70).

⁶⁴ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 176.

⁶⁵ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 78.

⁶⁶ Jander, “Romantic Form and Content”, 177.

⁶⁷ Grove, “Beethoven’s Violin Concerto”, 469.

Measures 71–79: Reprise of Theme B (Variation)

The last bar of the scale passage, b. 70, recalls another similarly transitional passage of semiquavers, b. 55. The last figure of both bars is very similar, yet while in the first instance the transitional passage leads to a high point (the climax of the movement), here, in the wake of the Tragic Theme, the soloist returns not to the mood of the almost sprightly chaconne but restates, in variation form, the wistful Theme B, The Pensive Theme. Theme B this time is augmented with demisemiquavers and an *arabesque* at b. 77 (recalling bb. 41–42, but is here more elaborate), as if the solo violin this time is deeper in a more ardent reverie. The *pianissimo* background accompaniment of the woodwinds is more spare in form than the “shimmering string foundation” (Stowell) in the first instance of Theme B; the mood has become even more still.⁶⁸ The one moment of a “brightening,” the chaconne at bb. 56–65, is well behind now. An ascending trill that suddenly drops two octaves leads into the next episode—

Measures 79–83: Reprise of Theme C (Variation)

—which begins with the End Motif as played by the horns (bb. 79–82). The Implacable haunts the movement from start to finish. Antony Hopkins describes the soft horns as “a restraining influence, preventing the soloist from straying too far.”⁶⁹ The soloist plays a slightly modified version of the poignant Theme C, the Tragic Theme, while the End Motif plays *pianissimo* in the background.

⁶⁸ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 78.

⁶⁹ Hopkins, *Seven Concertos of Beethoven*, 81.

Measures 83–91: Coda

The soloist rises gracefully via semiquavers (vaguely recalling the rocking theme), and a diminuendo and reduction in volume to *pianississimo* contribute to an ethereal atmosphere (bb. 83–86). At one point during this, at bb. 83–85, the strings play three G major chords which recall the End Motif of bb. 40–43.

The soloist's final phrase is a variation of the Reaching Theme, using the highest registers of the instrument (bb. 87–88). ("The soloist reminisces peacefully," Stowell observes.⁷⁰) At the same time, muted horns, and then the violins *pianississimo*, play the opening figure of Theme A (bb. 86–88). It is as Eliot has written: "In my beginning is my end"; but the difference is that this time the two main participants, the soloist and the orchestra, overlap.

Now comes, notes Stowell, "one of Beethoven's most dramatic gestures."⁷¹ The orchestral strings return, rising in volume from *pianississimo* to *forte* to *fortissimo* in three bars (bb. 87–89), the violins now playing *senza sord.* Theme A, the Implacable Theme, is transformed into a double-dotted rhythmic figure that arrives like a fist pounding upon a table. "Beethoven shatters the dream-like spell," writes Hopkins.⁷² The theme "forces us back to reality," Jander remarks.⁷³

The Implacable Theme modulates briskly from G major to D major and is followed by the soloist's trill which leads to the cadenza; and the night of the *Larghetto* gives way to the bright, reconciliatory third movement with its joyous allegro main theme.

⁷⁰ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 79.

⁷¹ Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, 79.

⁷² Hopkins, *The Seven Concertos of Beethoven*, 81.

⁷³ Jander, "Romantic Form and Content", 179.

/ This paper was written in 2008.